

Common Health Problems of Ferrets

Like all animals, ferrets are susceptible to many different ailments. Some common diseases of the ferret are:

1. Canine Distemper Virus - Ferrets are very susceptible to this virus. The death rate is almost 100%. Animals that are exposed to this virus begin to show signs of the disease 7-21 days after exposure. The animal will begin to lose its appetite and develop discharge from the eyes and then the nose. The lips may swell and the animal will not be as active as normal. The pet's condition usually continues to deteriorate until death occurs. Ferrets that do survive may die of neurological disease (i.e., seizures) weeks to months later.

2. Influenza (Flu) Virus - This is a common virus of ferrets. They usually catch the virus from their owners. Ferrets with influenza can transmit the disease to people. Signs of influenza in ferrets include: a loss of appetite, depression, fever, listlessness, sneezing, nasal discharge, and coughing. Typically, ferrets do recover, but supportive treatment is required.

3. Intestinal Obstructions - The curious nature of ferrets leads to indiscriminate eating. Ferrets have been known to eat rubber, soft plastic items, cotton balls, bones, towels, etc. These items may lead to an obstruction in the animal's digestive tract that may require surgical treatment. Preventative measures should be taken to assure no such objects are available to the ferret. This is the best method to avoid these problems. Ferrets

are also prone to getting hairballs. Ferrets with intestinal obstruction may become very ill. Signs of this illness may include vomiting and listlessness.

4. Heartworm - Ferrets are natural hosts for this parasite. The parasite lives in the salivary glands of mosquitoes, and is transmitted to ferrets when bitten by the mosquito. The larvae then grow in the ferret's heart, where they can cause disruption of the blood flow and death.

Young Children and Animals

Although ferrets are small, they can cause severe injuries to people, especially children. Parents should supervise contact between the ferret and children. If supervision is not possible, parents may wish to consider getting a ferret at a later date. Children should never be left alone with a ferret or any pet that can potentially injure a child.

Veterinary Care and Vaccinations

Ferrets should receive routine health examinations from a veterinarian. Your veterinarian can provide you with information about the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of diseases, and about appropriate vaccinations.

For a copy of act 358, Public Act of 1994 (The Ferret Law). Contact the Michigan Department of Agriculture.

For further information about the care of ferrets, contact your veterinarian.



Ferret Health Advisory Sheet



Information for Ferret Owners

(pursuant to Act 358, P.A. of 1994)

A copy of this Advisory Sheet must accompany every ferret sold or transferred within Michigan.

Animal Industry Division
www.michigan.gov/mda

General Regulations

Rabies Vaccination

Ferrets over 12 weeks of age are required to have a current rabies vaccination administered by a veterinarian. Owners are required to show a valid rabies certificate as proof of vaccination upon request by appropriate authorities.

If a ferret bites or otherwise potentially exposes a person to rabies, the owner or witness must report the incident within 48 hours to the county public health department. The ferret will be handled in accordance with the 1998 published rabies guidelines of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. This means that the ferret will be quarantined for a ten day period as per dogs and cats. If no clinical signs develop during that time period, then the ferret is considered to be incapable of having transmitted rabies to the bite victim.

Importing Ferrets Into Michigan

A ferret cannot be imported into Michigan unless it is accompanied by an official interstate health certificate, signed by an accredited veterinarian, that includes a record of vaccinations. Ferrets over 6 weeks of age are required to have a current rabies vaccination.

A ferret less than 6 weeks of age shall not be imported into Michigan unless accompanied by its natural mother.

Local Licensing of Ferrets

County, city village, or township governments may require licensing of ferrets similar to the licensing that has been established for dogs. Check with your local governing body to see if this applies to you.

Leash Law

A ferret is not allowed to leave the owner's property unless it is confined or leashed and under the direct control of the owner or a responsible person designated by the owner. Ferrets that are running loose may be picked up by animal control authorities.

Releasing a Ferret into the Wild

It is illegal for a person to abandon a ferret, or release a ferret into the wild. Ferrets released into the wild generally do not survive.

Purchasing a Ferret from a Hobby Breeder

A hobby breeder may not sell a ferret before it is at least 10 weeks old. The hobby breeder must provide the ferret purchaser with a contract of sale stating that if the ferret purchaser can no longer keep the ferret, it must be returned to the breeder from whom it was purchased. The hobby breeder must take the ferret back without question or conditions placed on the animal's return. The contract must make it clear that the purchaser cannot sell, surrender, give or otherwise transfer the ferret to anyone except the original breeder.

Caring for Your Ferret

General Information

Ferrets are from the Mustelid family and are related to skunks, otters, weasels, and minks. Their average life span is 5-7 years, and they weigh from 1-5 pounds. Male ferrets are called hobs, females are called jills, and the young are called kits.

Ferrets naturally emit a musky odor that varies in strength. This odor is stimulated by the animal's sex hormones, and

diminishes when the animal is neutered. They can also produce an odor from their anal glands. The animal will express these glands when it is scared, extremely excited, or has a disease. This odor will last for a few minutes only (unlike the skunk). Your veterinarian can advise you about whether or not these glands should be removed.

Feeding Your Ferret

Ferrets are carnivorous animals; i.e., primarily meat eaters. It is recommended that they be fed a high quality commercial product recommended by our veterinarian. It is important to remember that specific dietary requirements vary, depending on the ferret's age and health status. Ferrets should be provided with a source of fresh, clean water.

Housing Suggestions

A ferret should be provided with a secure cage large enough for the ferret to move about and stretch out comfortably. The floor may be tight wire or solid. Ferrets are prone to heat stress, so the cage should allow adequate airflow for cooling. Heavy water bowls or water bottles are recommended because ferrets are known to frequently tip over light containers. Ferrets can be litter trained.

When bringing a pet home, it is not a good idea to let it run free immediately, as there is a greater chance the ferret could be injured in an unfamiliar environment.

Neutering Your Animal

It is recommended that both males and females be neutered at 5-6 months of age. Females must be either neutered or be bred when they come into heat. Otherwise they may develop a fatal blood disease.